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beer. In fact they often subsist entirely on the latter to the complete exclusion of solids. Their wives, children, and courtiers also eat on the average more than the ordinary family, so much so that natives describe especially lavish hospitality as 'housekeeping after the fashion of the capital' (*umusango wa ku musumba*). But the difference is one of certainty of supply rather than of greatly increased consumption per day, and a small class of individuals only are affected. Otherwise the rich man and his poorer neighbours eat very much the same throughout the year.

Sex distinctions are not marked either. The man gets a larger share of meat or any favourite relish, but there are no foods specially tabooed to women, and I do not think the inequality is any greater than that common in many working households in this country. Age distinctions in diet are not pronounced. Young boys between 10 and 16 are probably the worst-fed section of the community since they have to forage for themselves and have no regular portion allotted to them, but even then the difference is not a striking one. Geographical variations in the food-supply certainly exist, but they are limited chiefly to differences in the amount of meat and fish consumed and not to the staple food. Therefore for all general purposes the following account may be taken as applying to the population as a whole.

Variations from Hunger to Plenty.

The most pronounced feature of this dietary is its alternation between hunger and plenty, a characteristic common to African peoples in areas where the distribution of rain allows only one season of cultivation a year, and where one staple crop is relied upon. In this territory the existence of a definite scarcity is noticed at once by the most casual observer. The Bemba constantly talk about 'hunger months' as distinguished from food months. At the end of the rainy season they regularly expect a shortage, whether it is severe or not. When the scarcity becomes marked the whole appearance of village life is changed. For adults meals are reduced from two to one a day, and beer is rarely if ever brewed. Children who seem to munch extras all day long in the plentiful season (April to October) are reduced to a single dish late in the day. In one bad year I saw cases of elderly people who ate nothing during the course of a day, and though this is not common, most adult natives can remember occasions when they went two days

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consumption of meals has to be fitted. Among primitive peoples, these facts stand out more clearly perhaps than in our own.

To the Bemba the meal is, in a sense, the climax of the day. Cooking is a long and tedious process, as will be seen (Chap. V). The whole series of activities involved in fetching fuel, drawing water, preparing flour and collecting relish must be begun afresh each day, and can be reckoned to take at least 3 hours out of that day. But the time and nature of the meal is fixed by the type of agricultural work in hand.[1] This fact accounts for two of the chief characteristics of Bemba eating custom: the concentration on a single daily meal, and the irregularity of that meal. Although the Bemba may take some snack in the early morning such as cold *ubwali* left over from the night before, or some sweet potatoes or ground-nuts, it is quite impossible for the women to prepare a dish of porridge and relish more than once a day unless they are free from other work. Men and women are accustomed to go to their gardens in the early morning to do the bulk of their work on what we habitually describe as 'an empty stomach'. They return to the village at about noon, when the whole community waits for the evening meal. This habit of eating late in the day seems to have become fixed. Natives working in European employment tend to keep to it. Loaded carriers seem to prefer to walk their daily fifteen miles or so before eating, and labourers on European farms usually do the morning shift, from 6 a.m. to noon, without a 'breakfast'. In at least one Mission school, where the young native teachers were offered food before morning classes, they refused, saying they would not be able to work properly if they ate so early in the day. It is difficult to know whether such preferences are due entirely to habit, or whether the type of meal eaten by the Bemba actually takes a long time to digest. It is interesting to note that the compound managers of the copper mines at the Roan Antelope and Mufulira considered that the natives worked better if they had eaten a breakfast before going on shift, and made this practice compulsory, but the meal was not the heavy porridge in this case, but cocoa and white bread.

This concentration on a single meal is a habit to which the children are only accustomed gradually. Bemba infants, as we saw, are suckled whenever they wish, and in early childhood they eat all day long if possible. Natives recognize that small children

[1] Cf. pp. 73, 104 and Chap. XVIII.

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cannot go so long without food as their elders and cook them extras when they can. Women who stay at home in the village all morning roast ground-nuts for the little children, or bake them sweet potatoes in season, while all the young people forage for what they can get from various relatives, or look for fruits in the bush. Mothers going to work may be seen carrying smouldering embers on a bark holder, ready to make small fires to roast maize cobs if they happen to be ripe in the gardens. But when food is short the children have to go without and expect to do so, and as they reach adolescence they begin to adopt the tribal belief that it is childish and undignified to be eating at all hours of the day. They finally express the ordinary adult preference for a meal late in the day rather than early. Some natives comment half disparagingly on the frequency of the white man's meals, although of course they admire the riches of a European who is constantly able to entertain his friends. The white man, chiefly the government official in this area, has now become a standardized figure in a series of folk-tales, and in these he is always represented as stopping constantly in the middle of any activity to take breakfasts or to drink tea. I once listened to some small boys playing at being Europeans—a very favourite game. The boy who was acting as the district officer sat lounging in an imitation chair made of branches and bark rope and repeatedly called, 'Bring food'. At last one of his fellows, acting servant, said aside in an aghast whisper, 'You can't ask for food again. We've only just brought it to you.' The 'white man's' answer was immediate. 'You know nothing about Europeans! That is just what they do all day—just sit and call, Boy! Bring me food.'

The chief meal of the Bemba varies tremendously both as to its time, its size, and the accessory foods that may be added to it during the day. These changes depend chiefly on the nature of the women's agricultural work from season to season, the monthly changes in the types of food available, and the time taken to cook them. For instance, at Pambalasa village (September 1930), the women were working late into the day to finish piling the branches for burning in their gardens. They were back late to the village, and got the single meal ready at about five. There was no early morning snack for most of them. At Candamukulu's village (April 1931), the women were harvesting, but at this time of the year the maize was ripe, and a few cobs could be quickly roasted at about 8 a.m. as well as the evening meal, which varied in individual cases

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right proportion of flour to water is apparently gained by experience, and no woman could give me a clear account of her reasons for measuring out what she did. To stir the porridge one of the big flat spoons (*miko*), about 2½ feet high, is first dipped in hot water, and then plunged into the seething mass of porridge. It must be held with two hands, the left at the top and the right near the blade, so that the heavy mass of porridge is moved with the whole weight of the body. This is arduous work and the interior of the porridge is sometimes hardly cooked, especially when a young girl cooks for large numbers. The process is complete in two or three minutes, and great lumps of *ubwali*, now brown and smooth and solid, are scraped off the *miko* into the eating baskets. Here they should be patted smooth with the stirrer into balls like plum puddings (*ukumeta*), a point on which the housewife prides herself.

The process of preparing maize flour is very different and reckoned by the Bemba as a troublesome one. The maize cobs must be pounded for long periods in a mortar before the grains become detached. They are then repounded and the product finally ground into flour with the grindstone. This is the ordinary method used by the women of most of the Nyasaland tribes and in Southern Rhodesia, who never seem to complain of the work. The fact that the Bemba are reluctant to use maize flour probably depends on a number of different factors, viz. their preference for porridge made of millet, the low yield of maize on this particular soil, and the unaccustomed nature of the work, rather than its inherent difficulty.

The preparation of cassava flour is a three- or four-day process and therefore alters the whole household routine. To make cassava flour the roots are dug from the beds as they are wanted and roughly peeled so that the shells come off, much of the vegetable being wasted by the Bemba in this way.[1] The inner part of the root must now be soaked. The bitter cassava contains, as is well known, hydrocyanic acid, but the natives do not apparently recognize the plant as being poisonous. Bemba say that some roots taste bitter, and that these are dangerous, but that it is one particular plant at fault, not the rest. Children are often given cassava to chew raw and no ill results are expected. In fact, among the neighbouring Bisa, unsoaked cassava (*kapango*) is sometimes

[1] Bisa scrape it more economically.

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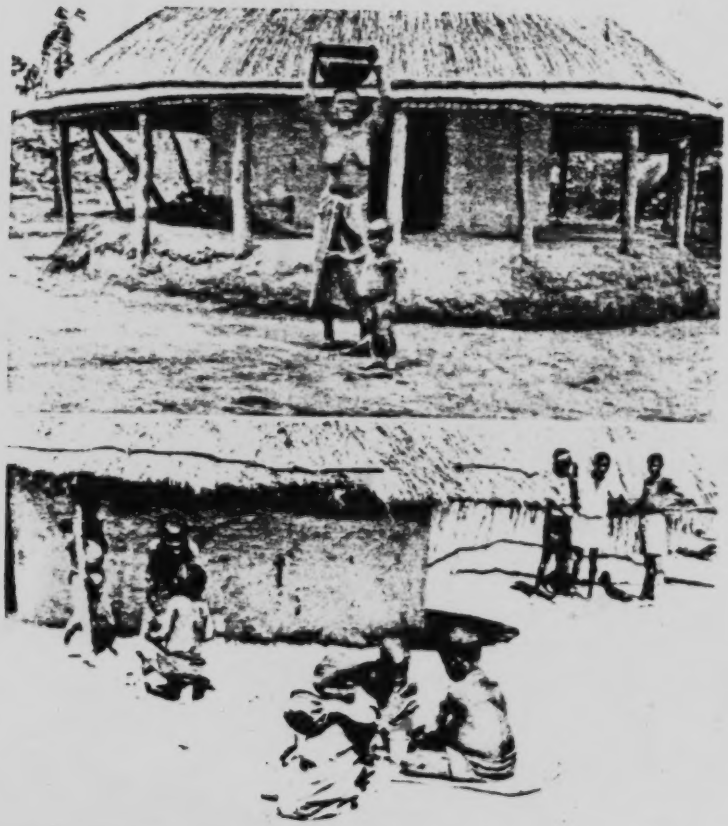

Fetching water for the kitchen.

First steps in cooking.

Grinding the daily flour.

[facing p. 106]